

# MARKET GARDEN APPLES

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“We started out and kept walking until, at a bridge, we spotted two apple-munching boys. Frank and I exchanged wide grins, as I pulled an apple out of my pocket and took a healthy bite.” The boys “were only 14 or 15 but showed the calm confidence of men twice their age,” said Major Howard Cannon. He and Colonel Frank Krebs had been shot down over the Netherlands 36 days before.

The two airmen were part of Operation Market Garden—the Allies own version of a *blitzkrieg*. At the time it was the largest airborne assault ever attempted. 20,000 paratroopers were flown 300 miles from bases in England and dropped as much as 64 miles behind enemy lines in the Netherlands—then occupied by Nazi Germany. An additional 14,600 troops were landed by glider. In the end, a total of 41,600 American, U.K., Canadian and Polish airborne troops participated in the offensive. 1,438 C-47 Dakotas and 321 converted RAF bombers were used to transport the airborne troops in the assault. Additionally, 3,140 gliders were used to transport men and equipment.

The goal was to seize a series of bridges along the Meuse River, two arms of the lower Rhine River and several tributaries and canals. Once secured, 20,000 military vehicles led by Britain’s XXX Corps would cross the lower Rhine River and “the vast allied armies would turn east and invade Germany.” Conceived by Britain’s Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, the assault got underway in mid September 1944. The battle lasted nine day and the Allies were defeated. The loss effectively “ended [the] Allied expectations of finishing the war in 1944.” The disastrous military venture was made into the 1977 epic war film, *A Bridge Too Far* with an ensemble cast including James Caan, Michael Caine, Sean Connery, Anthony Hopkins, Gene Hackman, Eliot Gould, Sir Laurence Olivier, Robert Redford and Maximillian Schell. Nearly 2,000 Allied men were killed and another

7,000 captured. 1,300 Nazi soldiers' lives were lost during the bloody encounter. There were 15,700 Allied casualties while 13,500 German soldiers met the same fate. 144 Allied transport aircraft were lost along with 88 ground tanks.

During the invasion, Krebs and Cannon were in the lead plane of a 45-ship formation of C47-Dakotas carrying the first wave of paratroopers to be dropped near the Arnhem Bridge. It was a day they would never forget.

Cannon recalled that the AA flak "was very heavy, but we got in OK and dropped the troops." They turned for home base in Exeter, England. "Then as we passed Breda—Wham! We took a hit." The six man crew bailed out and was separated. Cannon and Krebs hid in an irrigation ditch in a potato field. They buried themselves under wet leaves and brush "holding cocked .45 caliber pistols across their chests." They were joined by another crewmember, Tech Sergeant Fred Broga. A local farmer buried their chutes and told them to wait until nightfall. The men "sweated for seven hours" not knowing if the farmer was a "friend" or a "Nazi snitch." They wondered aloud in hushed whispers if "they should have shot him and got out of there?"

"Running on fear and adrenalin" the trio was turned over that night to the Dutch underground who began to move them through the ditches and brush of the Dutch countryside to a farmhouse where they were fed and hidden from Nazi patrols. "The Germans were shooting curfew breakers who didn't hold special identification," recalled Cannon. Days later they were moved to the attic of the Audenbosch police station. A few days later, outfitted in police uniforms, they were given motorcycles to ride to Breda. Out of Air Corps uniform they were legally spies, and would likely be executed if captured.

After Audenbosch, the trio was moved to Breda where they were housed in a warehouse with fifteen other Allied soldiers in similar straits. Broga stayed behind while Cannon and Krebs were given civilian clothes and new identities. Cannon became Hendrik van Gils, a city clerk, and Krebs became Cornelius Holzbausch, a school teacher.

Later their identities were changed again and they were dressed as farmers with Krebs shouldering a hoe. Krebs could speak German but Cannon couldn't so they wrapped a bandage around his neck and he "pretended to be incapable of speaking." The Allied servicemen then saw the identifying signal from the boys—munching the apples—and returned the signal in kind. It was during this final phase of their escape that the young local boys became their underground guides.

They couldn't avoid sentries and guard stations as they neared the front lines. According to Cannon "[we] bolstered our courage, and boldly walked by them, saying *Morgen* (morning in German) to the guards." Finally, they stopped at a bullet-riddled farmhouse where a widow hid them in an underground silo. German artillery had set up nearby—so close, according to Cannon, that he and Krebs "could clearly hear the orders to fire." The allies, of course, were firing back which battered and shook the silo—"the farmhouse was hit and the barn flattened." The artillery battle raged on for three days and nights. They were subjected to ear-piercing, nerve-racking blasts and a constant shuddering from the German 88s and allied return artillery fire. Cannon remembered "we thought the battle would rage forever." On the fourth night the Germans pulled out. The following morning Cannon and Krebs emerged from the silo and while stretching their legs, "yelling voices filled with unmistakable G.I. slang reached our ears. We both let out a Whoop and ran to meet them." Their forty-two day ordeal was finally over.

A few months later when Breda was finally liberated, Cannon, Krebs and Broga returned there with donated goods—"C-rations, clothes, candy, soap, cigarettes and other sundry items." They loaded the donated supplies into "a jeep-pulled trailer and then loaded that into a C-47." Landing at Breda they unloaded the jeep and trailer and retraced the steps they had earlier taken to avoid the Germans. "Only this time we were giving instead of taking." His contact with the Dutch people who "helped us remained one of the most memorable occasions of his life," claimed Cannon.

For their exploits and bravery Cannon and Krebs were awarded the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, Purple Heart, the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star, European Theatre Ribbon with 8 Battle Stars and a Presidential Citation.

Cannon had learned to fly while attending Dixie Junior College in his hometown of St. George, Utah. “It was an expensive hobby and I did all kinds of odd jobs to pay for my lessons and flying time as well.” “I was a pretty good saxophone player.” Using this musical talent, he formed a dance orchestra and played at local functions to help pay the costs associated with flying. One summer, he and his fifteen-member orchestra got a gig aboard a cruise ship which took them from San Francisco to Yokohama and Tokyo. After Dixie College Cannon matriculated at the University of Arizona where he earned a teaching degree followed by Law School. While studying at U of A Law School, he and his roommate were hired by the *Tucson Citizen* newspaper for an aerial newspaper route to outlying rural towns. They dropped bundles of newspapers “aiming for fat bushes to break the fall.”



In 1938 he moved back to his hometown of St. George, Utah where he took up the practice of law. He enlisted in the Utah National Guard and was called to duty in early 1941, shortly before Pearl Harbor. Because of his flying experience he was transferred to the Army Air Corps.

In 1945 at war's end Cannon relocated to Las Vegas, Nevada. In 1946 he enlisted in the Army Air Forces Reserve and transitioned into the Air Force Reserve. He achieved command pilot status and ultimately retired from the Air Force with the rank of Major General.

In 1949 he was appointed City Attorney and in 1958 he was elected to the United States Senate. When Frank Krebs retired from the Air Force, Cannon appointed his old commander and fellow war escapee to his Senate staff.



As a senator, Cannon was known as a hard worker— an acknowledged Senate insider with “Quiet Clout.” As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, upon which he served for 23 years, he was known as one of the flying senators—the other was Arizona’s Barry Goldwater. The two personally test-flew all new aircraft before voting for money to develop them—successful candidates included the F-14, F-15 and F-111. Cannon, “carefully monitored the progress of the F-117 while it was under development at the Groom Lake facility of Nellis Air Force base.” There were times; he recalled “when we were afraid it wasn’t ever going to get off the ground.” Cannon claimed the two biggest aviation thrills of his life were “flying the B58 Hustler bomber at Mach 2” in 1961 and later the F-111 shortly after it was put in operation.

Howard Cannon died in 2002 after a lifetime of military and public service. He was 90 at the time of his death and had logged over 5,000 hours during his storied air force career. Cannon is buried at the Arlington National Cemetery. He was preceded a few years earlier by his fellow air warrior—Frank Krebs.

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